

## Press correction and the Shakespearian editor by Gabriel Egan

The invitation to speak today came with the exhortation "to give accounts of problems and not accounts of accomplishments" and report on "what is troubling or not working or in need of fresh thinking". Good, because I might easily have misunderstood the invitation to speak on the future of editing Shakespeare by describing in detail the ideas that I think are going to be most influential on future editors. These are, firstly, co-authorship--the fact that Shakespeare co-wrote more plays than we used to think, and probably more than we currently think--and secondly, Shakespeare's having an eye to the market for his books rather than being solely a man of the theatre, and thirdly the idea that plays were routinely cut for performance. The theorizing of the problem of editing co-authored plays is relatively new, with Jeff Masten notably taking the post-structuralist line that one cannot extricate the blended authorial labours (Masten 1997; Masten 2001). Although she has expressed some sympathy with Masten's view (Gossett 2002), Suzanne Gossett recently put her finger on the double-bind that editing each scene (or even smaller unit) of a co-written play in the light of what one thinks were the habits of its particular writer tends to foreground the very discontinuities that editing in general tries to overcome and smooth out (by modernization and regularization), but not doing this tends to efface those discontinuities that are manifest in the text; either approach seems in danger of circularity (Gossett 2006). The second idea that I think will influence the future of editing Shakespeare is Lukas Erne's convincing argument that Shakespeare wrote for readers as well as actors (Erne 2002; Erne 2003), which has already prompted Juliet Dusinberre to edit the Arden *As You Like It* on the assumption that it is as much a readerly text as a theatrical one (Shakespeare 2006a, 113-20). Andrew Gurr's argument that the players licensed a maximal text but only ever played a subset of it, a minimal text (Gurr 1999), has convinced Michael Neill to abandon the currently dominant stage-centered approach and strive in his Oxford Shakespeare *Othello* to show what that maximal text looked like rather than the shorter version that was performed (Shakespeare 2006c, 406-11).

So, with that sketch of my predictions for the future out of the way, I will answer Peter's question about what is not working and in need of fresh thinking with press correction. Modern critical editions of Shakespeare usually touch upon the subject of proofing and stop-press correction in the early printed editions upon which they are based. The direct evidence for these processes is the existence of variants between exemplars of an early edition, showing that at some point in the print run the press was stopped and the type altered, and that sheets impressed after the alteration were mixed with those preceding it. There is also the evidence in the form of proofsheets used in stop-press correction being bound into surviving exemplars--five are known in the Shakespeare First Folio (Blayney 1991, 16)--but these I propose to leave aside in order to focus on variants. It is now well known that the hypotheses about proofing and stop-press correction generated by mid-twentieth century New Bibliographers were mistaken. In particular the assumption that printing began without initial rounds of proofing has been overturned. D. F. McKenzie pointed out that the proofs and revises from all processes of correction before the print run started leave us no evidence since the sheets were not retained (McKenzie 1969, 44). Peter W. M. Blayney observed that personal experience using a hand-press quickly convinces one that proofreading against copy before the run starts is essential if the first sheets are to be in any way usable (Blayney 1991, 15) and that in

the case of Q1 King Lear (1608) it can be shown with almost complete certainty to have taken place (Blayney 1982, 209-10).

The New Bibliography never achieved a consensus on the interpretation of the evidence of stop-press corrections made during a print run, which shows up in the variants between exemplars of an edition. At the start of the century, R. B. McKerrow had established the principle that the unit of press correction was the forme, not the page or the sheet, and hence that an editor should use this unit when selecting what best represents the ideal intention imperfectly embodied in an edition (Barnes 1904, xiii-xviii). But even supposing that one is able to tell which of the two states of a forme is the uncorrected and which the corrected, which of them is to be preferred by an editor? On the whole, W. W. Greg leaned towards accepting the readings in the corrected state of a forme, except where an accident of the press seems to have necessitated the corrections, or where it seems clear that copy was not consulted to make the changes (Greg 1942, xlvi). Fredson Bowers leaned in the opposite direction and argued that in the absence of evidence that the printers consulted their copy when making press corrections (and rarely can one show that they must have) the default assumption should be that correction was done without reference to copy and hence the uncorrected state is closer to the authorial manuscript--for it was in sight when the uncorrected forme was set--and should be preferred (Bowers 1952). Greg and Bowers thought that if the compositors were able to do it, they got the inner and outer formes of a sheet ready at the same time so that after a single proofing impression of one it could be removed from the press and corrected while the other was machined. Although they disagreed on the precise method, their hypothesized procedures produced the happy outcome that a variant forme is always backed by an invariant one that has been corrected (Greg 1940, 40-57; Bowers 1947-8, Bowers 1948, 585-86). This is happy for the editor since the discovery of a variant forme would then prove that no uncorrected states of the other side were ever printed and hence she may rely on it even if only a few exemplars survive. This New Bibliographical certainty has not endured. D. F. McKenzie conjectured (McKenzie 1969), and then Philip R. Rider (Rider 1977) and Peter W. M. Blayney (Blayney 1982, 43-59), proved that printers did not rush to complete one book before moving to the next but rather printed formes from multiple books in any order that might balance the workload of the printshop, and hence the rules for inferring a book's order of presswork developed by Bowers's Virginian School of bibliography were inapplicable. Knowing that concurrent printing invalidated a large part of his life's work, Bowers fought a losing rearguard action that "fantastic assertion" (Bowers 1973, 119) until his death.

Let us approach a concrete example by starting with the problem of telling the uncorrected from the corrected state of a variant forme, or indeed the less corrected from the more corrected where there are three or more states. An edition that I have been looking at closely is Q2 (1604-5) Hamlet, which survives in seven exemplars: three in the United Kingdom, three in America, and one in Poland. When John Dover Wilson collated Q2 in the 1930s the exemplar was undiscovered, and using it and an altogether more careful collation Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor have, for their Arden3 edition of the play, added eight variants to the eighteen found by Wilson (Wilson 1934, 123-24; Shakespeare 2006b, 479n1, 524-55). These twenty-six variants are found across eleven formes, ten of them clustered on forme N(outer). Aside from N(outer), the variants involve just one or two short lines of type--short in

the sense that there are spaces between the line's last word and the end of the line-- and the changes fix literal errors of some importance. [SLIDE] A typical example is "Your Officres" becoming "Your Officers" (L1r). That correction could be made by anyone literate person without consulting copy. [SLIDE] The same is perhaps true of "Showe me the step and thorny way to heauen" becoming "Showe me the steepe and thorny way to heauen" (C3v), although the error is rather less obvious and the correction either considerably more reliant upon the poetic insight of the corrector or else it was done by consultation of copy.

Since the unit of correction is the forme, the standard procedure is to examine all variants within a forme looking for one or more that incontrovertibly shows directionality. Since no-one would intentionally alter the good reading "Your Officers" to the bad reading "Your Officres" or "steepe" to "step", the good readings seem to be the results of stop-press correction. However, it IS possible for good readings to be turned bad by miscorrection, and there are often variants where both readings are equally good, or bad. Q2 Hamlet has examples of both these problems, and there seems to be nothing in the way of a rule, a default assumption, that editors might apply in such cases. Where there are multiple variants within a forme, the editor has at least the chance to consider them as a batch to see if directionality emerges. Assuming that all the changes were made at once, a determination of the directionality--which state is the uncorrected and which the corrected--should help with the indifferent variants. For if it can be determined which is the corrected state it might be possible to tell that copy was consulted if some of the improvements are too good to be attributed to the unaided wit of the corrector. If copy was consulted then the corrected state should be accepted for all the readings, except those that are clearly miscorrections.

[SLIDE] This table shows that there are three extant states of N(outer) in Q2 Hamlet, which must therefore have been corrected twice. This is order that Wilson put the states in (Wilson 1934, 129), with correction occurring between the three rows reading down the page. First the forme was typeset as show in the Folger, Huntington, Beinecke, and Wroclaw exemplars (the top row) and the sheets that ended up in those copies (plus more, presumably) were wrought off. [SLIDE] Then the press was stopped and 8 corrections were made: thirtie > thereby, pall > fall, dosie > dazzie, yaw > raw, neither in > neither, in, too't > doo't, be hangers > be might hangers, and A did sir > A did so sir. The press was restarted and the sheet that ended up in the British Library copy (plus more, presumably) was wrought off. [SLIDE] Then the press was stopped again and two more corrections were made (sellingly > fellingly and reponsiue > responsiue) and the the press restarted to produce, amongst others, the sheets that ended up in the Cambridge and Bodleian exemplars. [SLIDE] This order of correction is an hypothesis based on variants themselves and we might disagree with it: [SLIDE] why not say that the Cambridge and Bodleian exemplars (bottom row) are the least corrected and the Folger, Huntington, Yale, and Polish exemplars (top row) the most corrected? We can rule out other permutations such as the British Library exemplar (middle row) being the most or least corrected--let's move it to the top [SLIDE]--because that would require a second round of correction to undo the first no matter how we order the other two states. Here's the problem if the Folger, Huntington, and Wroclaw exemplars show the intermediate state [SLIDE]; see how dazzie has to become dosie and then be turned back to dazzie. And if we switch the bottom two so that the Cambridge and

Bodleian exemplars show the intermediate state, sellingly would have to become fellingly and then be turned back to sellingly. If we agree that a second round of correction undoing a first in this way is impossible, then the British Library exemplar is the intermediate state and the options are either [SLIDE] this or [SLIDE].

Obviously, the variants make no sense considered out of their dramatic contexts, so let us look at those context to see if we agree with Wilson and the new Arden editors that this [SLIDE] is the order of correction. [SLIDE] For Thompson and Taylor (Shakespeare 2006b, 479), there is clear of improvement in turning to thirtie into thereby here:

[CLAUDIUS]

This graue shall haue a liuing monument,  
An houre of quiet thirtie shall we see  
Tell then in patience our proceeding be. Exeunt  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, sig. N1)

[CLAUDIUS]

This graue shall haue a liuing monument,  
An houre of quiet thereby shall we see  
Tell then in patience our proceeding be. Exeunt  
(L, C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N1)

For Claudius to specify one hour and then instantly revise it to 30 hours (modernized that would be "an hour of quiet--thirty--shall we see") is a more awkward reading than that offered by an alteration of thirtie to thereby, but the case is arguable either way. The second variant is much more evenly balanced [SLIDE]:

[HAMLET]

Our indiscretion sometime serues vs well  
When our deepe plots doe pall  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, sig. N1)

[HAMLET]

Our indiscretion sometime serues vs well  
When our deepe plots doe fall  
(L, C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N1)

Both readings make perfect sense, so the variant is indifferent. The third variant, involving the praise of Laertes, might at first seem straightforward [SLIDE]:

[COURTIER]

to speake sellingly of him, he is the card or kalender  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, L, sig. N2v)

[COURTIER]

to speake fellingly of him, he is the card or kalender  
(C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N2v)

The word fellingly is generally taken to be an alternative spelling of feelingly, which Shakespeare used often, and most textual critics have seen this as a clear improvement over a word that is unique in all English literature it seems, sellingly. As we shall see, Thompson and Taylor disagree, so we may leave ourselves undecided for now.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth variants are also about Laertes and occur within two lines, so they may be taken together [SLIDE]:

[HAMLET]

to deuide him inuentorially, would dosie th'arithmaticke of  
memory, and yet but yaw neither in respect of his quick saile  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, sig. N2v)

[HAMLET]

to deuide him inuentorially, would dazzie th'arithmaticke of  
memory, and yet but raw neither, in respect of his quick saile  
(L, C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N2v)

If we think that neither dosie nor dazzie makes much sense, their equal obscurity makes this variant indifferent. However, in the Arden2 Hamlet Harold Jenkins defended dosie as rare verb meaning to bewilder, to stupify (Shakespeare 1982, 5.2.114n). Jenkins's successors Thompson and Taylor consider the corrected state's dazzie to be an improvement that did not quite go all the way, and they complete the correction by printing what Shakespeare meant, which is dazzle. There is a long editorial tradition of adopting the Q3 reading of dizzie here, but it need not detain us. The meanings of yaw and raw are also obscure, which of course is the point of the speech: Hamlet is mocking convoluted and obscure court-speak. As a nautical term, yaw (meaning to point away from the direction of heading) has at least the merit of agreeing with the metaphorical saile but editors have historically been divided on this one. The comma between neither and in seems indifferent.

The seventh variant is also indifferent [SLIDE]:

Hora[tio, to Courtier] Ist not possible to vnderstand in another tongue, you will  
too't sir really.  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, sig. N2v)

Hora[tio, to Courtier] Ist not possible to vnderstand in another tongue, you will  
doo't sir really.  
(L, C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N2v)

The expression to it is implicitly accompanied by the verb to go (so, go to it), which in this context is as acceptable as do it. The eighth variant is straightforward, as one reading seems to be nonsense [SLIDE]:

[COURTIER]

the carriages in faith, are very deare to fancy, very reponsiue to  
the hilts  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, L, sig. N2v)

[COURTIER]

the carriages in faith, are very deare to fancy, very responsiue to  
the hilts  
(C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N2v)

As reponsiue is not a known word, the adding of an s seems a clear correction, whereas it is hard to see why the printers would go the other way and change responsiue to reponsiue.

The ninth variant is tricky because we have to weigh up the value of a change that would be an improvement had it not been bungled [SLIDE]:

[HAMLET]

I would it be hangers till then  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, sig. N3)

[HAMLET]

I would it be might hangers till then  
(L, C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N3)

Hamlet is referring to the word carriages that the Courtier Osric had used for the leather and metal straps by which rapiers are suspended from the belt, which Hamlet thinks more more appropriate if cannons, not swords, hung at a man's hips. Until they do, he says, let the word be hangers. If the word might were essential to Hamlet's meaning, we could say that the second version of this speech shows a press correction that was intended to put might before be but mistakenly put it after be. However, the word might is not essential to the meaning, for the subjunctive mood is already clear from Hamlet's I would. Indeed, one could argue that there is more sense in seeing correction going the other way, from the ungrammatical be might hangers to the perfectly acceptable be hangers, if such a change could be explained.

The tenth and last variant on this forme is indifferent [SLIDE]:

Hora[tio] This Lapwing runnes away with the shell on his head.

Ham[let] A did sir with his duggle before a suckt it  
(F, HN, Y<sup>2</sup>, Wro, sig. N3)

Hora[tio] This Lapwing runnes away with the shell on his head.

Ham[let] A did so sir with his duggle before a suckt it  
(L, C<sup>2</sup>, VER, sig. N3)

To summarize, then, we have 10 variants on this forme, of which about half (depending on your point of view) are utterly indifferent and all but one (reponsiue > responsiue) could be argued either way with more or less conviction. [BLANK SLIDE]

What is an editor to do? The Arden editors' table of variants (Shakespeare 2006b, 524-25) shows their acceptance of Wilson's deduction of the order of correction, this order [SLIDE]. But they elected to pick and choose between the variants on their

individual merits, presumably (they do not tell the reader directly) on the assumption that some were miscorrections. They have Hamlet and Osric speak sellingly of Laertes and yaw in respect of his quick sail, and dazzie they treat as a bungled attempt to correct to dazzle and be might hangers as a bungled attempt to correct to might be hangers. The danger that comes with asserting that so many apparent corrections were really miscorrections is that it threatens to undermine the basis upon which was made the original determination of the order of correction. To take the extreme case, if one rejected all the corrections on a forme as miscorrections it would be hard to explain what the printers thought they were up to, and one might better reverse one's judgment and attribute all the miscorrections to the uncorrected state. In preferring the reading sellingly from what they consider the uncorrected state of this forme, Thompson and Taylor reject as miscorrection a change that all other editors have considered a clinching piece of evidence for determining the order of correction. That is, most people think sellingly so obviously a misreading of the Shakespearian word fellingly that it proves that the Folger, Huntington, Yale, and Polish exemplars show the least corrected state. The Arden editors still think that the Folger, Huntington, Yale, and Polish exemplars show the least corrected state and the Cambridge and Bodleian exemplars the most corrected--remember that the British Library exemplar must be the intermediate state--and although they do not explain themselves the only remaining strong reason for this belief [SLIDE] is the alteration of reponsiue to responsiue. To challenge that piece of evidence one might hope that the Oxford English Dictionary contains the word reponsive, and indeed it does but only as its own misprint of responsive (OED need n. 10c [Additions of 1993] quotation from 1960; sense n. 30 \*sense-cells quotation from 1908). Such accidents happen, but can we be sure that in Q2 Hamlet the word reponsiue is itself wrong? In context, the sense required is 'answering to', or 'matching': "Three of the carriages in faith, are very deare to fancy, very reponsiue to the hilt" (N2v). The cultural context is French courtly excess and flamboyance. Laertes has been in France earning a reputation for his rapier that Claudius says has been bruited in the Danish court by Lamord of Normandy (L4-L4v), and Laertes's side of the wager is "six French Rapiers and Poyuards" (N2v), the 'carriages' of which are in question.

National honour is at stake, and Laertes stands for the foreigners: "six French swords their assignes, and three liberall conceited carriages, that's the French bet against the Danish" (N3r). The Courtier's elaborate court language is mocked by Hamlet and Horatio encourages him to use "another tongue", meaning plain English. When Hamlet asks for clarification, "What call you the carriages?", Horatio maintains the mockery of over-elaborated formality by joking that footnotes are needed to understand this Courtier: "I knew you must be edified by the margent ere you had done" (N2v-N3r). Glossing and glozing are cognate (from the French verb gloser) and the earlier mockery of Polonius's euphuism is here repeated in respect of diction instead of syntax. The carriages 'answering to' the hilts might, then, be reponsiue (not responsiue) if this were a coinage derived from the French réponse meaning 'answer'. Lexicons of Early Modern English gives no examples of reponsive and Literature Online's earliest example of the French word reponse appearing in English literature is Cornelius Arnold's poem "The mirror for the year 1755". Arnold uses the word in a shard of French embedded in English to connote elaborate flamboyance, and curiously it too concerns a "prating" and "fribbling" dandy [SLIDE]:

A Kerchief white then from his Neck [Death] did lease [steal],  
Which gave the Beau a Cold, when, sans reponse,  
He shrug'd, his Throat grew sore, could hardly wheeze  
(Arnold 1757, 159)

It might be argued that reponsiue is unlikely to be a Shakespearian coinage because it is found nowhere else but Q2 Hamlet. But that is also true of the variant sellingly that Thompson and Taylor adopt in place of fellingly, for it too is absent from the rest of English literature. In addition to his many coinages that caught on and entered the language, Shakespeare seems to have minted some that did not, as John Jowett argued is the case with the word inductious in Richard 3's opening soliloquy "Plots have I laid inductious, dangerous", a Q1 reading that Jowett preferred over the familiar Folio reading of inductions (Shakespeare 2000, 1.1.31 and pp. 378-379). If we admit the possibility of a similar coining in this case, we lose the certainty that reponsiue was corrected to responsiue (rather than vice versa) and thereby lose the only remaining piece of evidence that might help an editor tell the uncorrected from the corrected state of this forme.

What to do? One way forward is to do as Blayney did for King Lear and attempt to reconstruct the document used in press-correction, the proof-sheet (Blayney 1982, 219-57). [SLIDE] This requires first constructing the forme of type for N(outer), done here using images from the printed book, [SLIDE] then making a mirror image [SLIDE] to produce the printed proof-sheet that the corrector wrote upon [SLIDE], which we may rotate [SLIDE] to see him working on the pages with the most extensive corrections, and then we may zoom to see just where the proof-reader made his handwritten corrections. Blayney hypothesized that if the proof-reader folded the proof-sheet (down the black vertical line here), long instructions written in the right margin for one page (here, N2v on the left of the screen) could become isolated in the left margin of the adjacent page (here, N3r on the right of the screen) and so cause the compositor to make perform miscorrections on that adjacent page. Only on this forme in the book are there multiple press corrections on subsequent lines, and it is noticeable that the only two occasions when this happens were thus aligned horizontally on the proof-sheet. But applying the conjectured proof-reader's marks that Blayney shows appearing in other books printed by Nicholas Okes, I have been unable to produce convincingly confusing marks in the right margin of N2v that sprawl across the gutter so as to cause miscorrection in N3r. Here I have marked up in boxes all the adjustments, but of course the proof-reader did not call for these. [SLIDE] In order to change be hangers to be might hangers [SLIDE] within a prose passage, the compositor had to adjust the four lines below to get the extra word in. [SLIDE] When writing his marks (indicated by crosses here) the proof-reader merely indicated the readings wanted, not how to achieve them, and trying out the various symbols that Blayney thinks were used I am unable to reproduce spurious marks across the gutter that could affect the press correction on the adjacent page [SLIDE].

In fact, I think we can account for the adjustment to the type on N3r with a quite different explanation involving this headline [SLIDE]. Studies by Fredson Bowers, John Russell Brown, W. Craig Ferguson, Adrian Weiss and Eric Rasmussen all point to Q2 Hamlet being set by two compositors using two distinct set of type with differing faces and two independent pairs of skeleton formes, dividing their work by sheets (Bowers 1953, 19; 1953-4, 79-80; 1955; 1956; Brown 1955; Ferguson 1989,



15; Weiss 1989; 1991; Rasmussen 2008). Or rather, these two compositors kept their skeletons independent until this page, N3r, was imposed, when one of the compositors borrowed this headline from the other compositor in order to get the forme N(outer) ready for printing. Borrowing this headline from the other compositor was a mistake, since the two men were setting to a slightly different measure and the headline was about three-quarters of a millimetre too large. I've counted the width of the type pages in 6 of the 7 surviving exemplars and the other compositor's work is consistently set to a slightly larger measure, which means that this borrowed headline was fractionally too big to sit above this page of type. If the compositor failed to take up the difference by adding something to the type page, the type below this headline would be slightly loose. Obviously, it was not loose enough to fall out while the forme was being carried to the press, or if it was then the entire print run for this forme began after the compositor had recovered from that accident. Once in the press a little looseness in the type could be exacerbated by machining, but even this would at most cause just a few letters to be pulled out during inking, which would not necessitate resetting these four lines. However, if the forme was removed from the press during the run--say, because the press was wanted to pull a foul-proof of another forme for this or another job (Blayney 1982, 209)--then a block of loosened type this size might become pied on the coffin of the press and have to be reset. This is of course conjecture. Seemingly against the hypothesis of pieing across this whole section it is the fact that in these four lines, several runs of adjacent words were either moved as unbroken units or put back together with exactly their original spacing for there is no sign of adjustment within them. Such resetting with original spacing is possible when recovering from the pieing of a section of one page. If enough pieces of type fell out that the copy had to be consulted in order to put it back, the need to change be hangers to might be hangers (assuming that that is the correct reading) could have been spotted when the copy was consulted and since there was resetting to be done in any case the change would be worth making.

I mentioned that for several runs of words in this four-line section the type seems to have been moved in unbroken units. How can we tell this? Those of us without access to a Hinman collating machine, or who (like me) cannot see the stereoscopic images produced by Randall McLeod's and R. Carter Hailey's collating machines, the best solution has been McLeod's suggestion of photocopying books onto transparent film so that the type from one can be placed over the type from another to check the relative positions of letters (McLeod 1979). This method can be done without xeroxing (which can on some machines introduce non-linear scaling distortions of its own) now that high quality digital images of books are available and good graphics software is free. [SWITCH TO GIMP] Here in the open-source graphics software package GIMP I have on the screen the same 4-line same speech from the allegedly uncorrected Folger exemplar at the top of the screen and the allegedly corrected British Library exemplar at the bottom, both copied from EEBO's high-contrast microfilm images that are better for this purpose than more recent photographs. With the images scaled to the same size and made semi-transparent, it is easy to overlap them and show where the type has either been kept intact or reset with precisely the same spacing.

Reviewing Blayney's The Texts of King Lear and their Origins a quarter of a century ago, Paul Werstine thought that is heralded "the disappearance of a genre of scholarly publishing--the article offering a reconstruction of the printing of a play-

quarto" since there was just too much work to be done; each play requires a whole monograph (Werstine 1985, 125). These monographs have not appeared and critical editions have not filled the gap either. When the second series of Arden editions began in the 1950s, some editors, such as John Russell Brown, undertook fresh bibliographical investigations, inspired by the technical approaches of Virginian school headed by Fredson Bowers. The latest Arden Hamlet, however, reconsiders the problem of press corrections in Q2 only briefly (Shakespeare 2006b, 478-80) and without the extensive attempts to recreate the conditions that might have given rise to them that Blayney used for Q1 King Lear. In the absence of the rules that the high New Bibliographers gave us, such as Greg's 'prefer the corrected state' or Bowers's 'prefer the uncorrected state', the problem of dealing with press variants seems vulnerable to editorial caprice. To accept part of the New Bibliographical tradition, as Thompson and Taylor do in adopting without comment Wilson's conjectured order of stop-press correction in this forme, while rejecting other parts (such as rules about which state to prefer) makes for incoherence in the method. The inheritance of certain assumptions should justified by a summary of the reasons for accepting them, or else (and I think preferably) the entire matter should either be reexamined from first principles.

The whole problem of press variants is in need of reconsideration in the light of fresh evidence. We now know that concurrent printing was common and that the technical approaches to headline reuse and type recurrence pioneered by Bowers and Hinman yield much less certain knowledge than they thought. Blayney was aware of this, but not that compositor identification by the so-called psycho-mechanical habits of spacing around punctuation developed by T. H. Howard-Hill, which he relied upon (Blayney 1982, 234n1), are also entirely unreliable (McKenzie 1984; Zimmerman 1985). New long monographs like Blayney's are unlikely to fill the need for a reexamination of press variants, but a large and properly-funded digital project might. A considerable barrier to the work is the technical difficulty of modelling a number of different hypotheticals at once. For example, Howard-Hill's psycho-mechanical spacing tests reassigned to compositor E a number of Folio pages that Hinman thought were set by compositor B. When examining what follows from these assignments, writers of large books necessarily have to fix their premisses at the beginning, they have to say who they think right and who wrong. The advantage of digitally modelling these hypothesis is that one can switch between them at will, showing what follows first from Hinman's assignment of stints and then, quick rapidly, what follows from Howard-Hill's. The "fresh thinking" that this meeting was called to discuss needs some new digital tools for framing and testing our existing premisses.

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